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# HISTORY

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OF THE

## OLIVER, VASSALL AND ROYALL HOUSES IN DORCHESTER CAMBRIDGE AND MEDFORD

BY

ROBERT TRACY JACKSON, S. D.

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THE RIVERBANK HOUSE, BARN AND GOLF HOUSE IN BOSTONVIEW FROM THE SOUTHWEST

# HISTORY OF THE OLIVER, VASSALL AND ROYALL HOUSES IN DORCHESTER, CAMBRIDGE AND MEDFORD.

BY ROBERT TRACY JACKSON, S. D.

In a notice of my friend, the late Mr. John Richardson of Dorchester, Mass., that I recently published in the Transactions of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society, some historical facts were given that it seemed might advantageously be published in a journal devoted to such subjects. These facts, with some additions and slight alterations, in so far as they deal with the houses considered, are given in the following pages. Mr. Richardson was an old-school gentleman and ardent horticulturalist. He was born in Boston in 1798, but lived for sixty-eight years, until his death in 1887, in the fine old mansion known as the Oliver or Everett house, at the "Five Corners" in Dorchester. It was more commonly known as the "Everett House," as it was here that Edward Everett was born in 1794, and George Richardson, brother of John, hired and later purchased it of the Everett family.

I would express my warm thanks for aid in gathering facts to Mrs. Lorenzo Prouty, for access to the diary and account books of Mr. George Richardson, running from 1819, for some twenty-five years. Also hearty thanks are due to my friend Henry M. Spelman, Esq., of Cambridge, who sought in the Registry of Deeds for facts in regard to the early history of the Lowell lands.

The Oliver or Everett House in Dorchester is described and illustrated quite fully in the notice of Mr. Richardson, but here

only historical data concerning it are given. This house, built by Robert Oliver in 1745, was an extremely interesting house in itself, but in addition, has a picturesque interest as the forerunner, or close associate, of several of our finest old Colonial mansions. Robert Oliver's son Thomas, doubtless built the Lowell house, and his son-in-law John Vassall built the Longfellow house in Cambridge. His mother-in-law, Mrs. Isaac Royall, occupied the splendid mansion of that name in Medford, and connections by marriage occupied most of the old houses known as "Tory Row" in Cambridge as described.

Mr. James H. Stark of Dorchester worked out a careful history of the several owners and residents of the Everett House. Records from the Registry of Deeds are given in his paper, but as they are in print it does not seem necessary to repeat them. Further information was gathered from Paige, Oliver, Harris and other sources as noted.

"About 1737, Robert Oliver, a wealthy planter from Antigua [West Indies], settled in Dorchester. . . . [William H. Whitmore cites records of purchases of land in Dorchester by Robert Oliver in 1738, and at later dates, and a petition by him in 1739 as a house owner to the town of Dorchester.] He brought a wife, Anne<sup>1</sup>, and one son Thomas, who became later the last Lieutenant-Governor of the Province of Massachusetts. . . . Robert bought a number of pieces of land [in Dorchester], of which 30 acres had been the property of Comfort Foster; and on this homestead lot, he built in 1745, a fine mansion which took the place of a more modest house. [Pl. 1] . . . Tradition records that he brought many black slaves with him, and dwells with scornful pity upon the fact that they carried burdens on their heads in ignorance of the proper use of a Yankee wheelbarrow.'" (Stark). Three of his slaves, named Ann, Cambridge and Betty, are buried in the old North Cemetery in Dorchester. Trask comments on Oliver's slaves, and their method of working.

The graves of these slaves are in the northwestern portion of the cemetery, near to what is now Columbia Road, formerly Boston St. Their positions are close together and are marked by three small slate head-stones. The epitaphs are worth recording as I believe they have not been previously published.

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<sup>1</sup> Oliver, Paige, and other authorities usually spell the name Ann.

"ANN A NEGRO CHILD | BELONGING TO M<sup>r</sup> |  
ROBERT OLIVER, & | DAUG<sup>r</sup> TC HIS  
NEGRO | NIMBO ; AGED 2.Y<sup>rs</sup> |  
DIED JUNE 1743. | "

"CAMBRIDGE A NEGRO | BOY BELONG-  
ING TO | ROBERT OLIVER Esq<sup>r</sup> |  
AGED 3 YEARS HE | DIED DEC<sup>r</sup>  
Y<sup>e</sup> 14<sup>th</sup> | 1747 " |

"BETTY A NEGRO | SERVANT  
OF COL: | ROBERT OLIVER: |  
DIED FEB<sup>r</sup> Y<sup>e</sup> 19<sup>th</sup> 1748. AGED |  
ABOUT 25 YEARS." |

Robert Oliver, Esq., 2<sup>nd</sup> son of Colonel Richard Oliver of Antigua married at St. Johns, Antigua, 3 Feb. 1722, Ann Brown, daughter of James Brown of Antigua by Elizabeth his wife, which Elizabeth Brown, Widow married 2ndly in 1707, Isaac Royall of Antigua.<sup>1</sup> Robert and Ann Oliver had children, James baptized 19 Feb. 1729-30 at St. Johns; Thomas born 5 Jan. 1733-4 at Antigua; Samuel, baptized 20 Jan. 1734-5 at St. Johns; Ann, baptized 22 Oct. 1724 at St. Johns [James, Samuel and Ann probably all died young]; Isaac, born 20 September 1738; Elizabeth, born 13 October 1741, and Richard, born 19th May 1744, the last three all in Dorchester. Robert Oliver's wife died 20 December 1751, and he died 16 December 1762 (dates from Oliver, vol. 2, and Dorchester Births, Marriages and Deaths). The Boston Post-Boy for December 20, 1762, has the following brief obituary. "Thursday morning last, died at his Seat in Dorchester, in the 63d Year of his Age, Col. Robert Oliver. A Gentleman of an extensive Acquaintance, remarkable for his Hospitality to All, was Kind to the Poor, and in his Military Character belov'd and esteem'd: his Family and Neighbors have met with a great Loss in this Bereavment. His Remains are to be interr'd Tomorrow at 3 o'clock in the Family Tomb at Dorchester." (Stark).

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<sup>1</sup> Oliver, vol. 1, p. 76-77, vol. 2, p. 346-347. He gives records of both marriages from the Parish Register at St. John. In his book Mr. Oliver says that Robert Oliver was the third son of Colonel Richard Oliver of Antigua, but in a letter dated 5 April, 1905, Mr. Oliver wrote me that this was an error. It has been proved, he writes, since his book was printed, that Robert Oliver was the *second*, not the *third*, son of Col. Richard Oliver of Antigua.



Thomas Oliver, son of Robert, graduated from Harvard College 1753, taking the degrees of A. B. and A. M. He married Elizabeth, daughter of Colonel John Vassall, Senior, of Cambridge in 1760 (Paige, p. 619), Thomas's sister as stated marrying Colonel John Vassall the Second in the following year, thus making a double marriage between the two families. Thomas and Elizabeth Oliver had children, Ann, born 17 November 1763; Elizabeth, born 12 July, 1766, in Dorchester (Dorchester Births, Marriages and Deaths); Penelope, baptized 2 October, 1768, in Cambridge, where in the records of Christs Church are recorded the baptisms of all three children (Harris, in the Vassalls of N. E.). There were also three other children, Mary, Lucy, and Frances. Thomas Oliver's wife Elizabeth died after he went to England and he married 3 June 1781 at St. Johns, Antigua, Harriet, only child and heir of the Hon. Byam Freeman of Antigua. By his second wife he had Harriet Watkins and Emily Freeman. (Oliver, vol. 3, p. 346-347.)

"Robert Oliver in his will gave his son Thomas, a suit of mourning, a ring and twenty shillings, and no more, because Thomas's grandfather James Brown [father of Mrs. Robert Oliver, and first husband of Mrs. Isaac Royall] and his great-uncle Robert Oliver had already given him a greater estate than the father could." (Stark).

Probably on account of close relations with the Vassall and other families resident in Cambridge, in 1766 Oliver moved to that town. "Thomas Oliver disposed of his property in Dorchester when he went to Cambridge. On July 1, 1766 . . . he sold to Ebenezer and Lemuel Clap, about thirty-nine acres of land, reserving only the mansion-house and barn, and the land in front of it. This lot with the reservation covered almost precisely the original possession of Comfort Foster . . . We do not know who occupied the Oliver house for the next few years, but on 11 May, 1770, . . . Thomas Oliver sold the house etc. with three and one half acres of land, for £250 to Richard Lechmere [of Cambridge] giving him also about half an acre on the south front . . . [the "triangle," see later]. Richard Lechmere was the uncle by marriage of Oliver's wife, he having married Mary Phips, whose sister Elizabeth married Col. John Vassall." (Stark.)

"We will now trace the house and land. Richard Lechmere sold them 15 January 1771, to Ezekial Lewis . . . Lewis sold

them 4 April 1771 . . . to John Vassall [brother-in-law of Thomas Oliver]. Vassall was a Royalist and a refugee, and was banished by act of the Legislature, his property being confiscated. On June 12, 1781, . . . Richard Cranch, Samuel Henshaw and Samuel Barrett, a committee for such purposes, sold the property to John Williams. . . . [John Williams executors] on November 24, 1786, sold it to Bossinger Foster, . . . Bossinger Foster sold it to Lucretia Callahan, November 2, 1787, . . . John and Lucretia Callahan sold it to Oliver Everett, November 10, 1792." (Stark.)

It is an interesting coincidence that one of the choice seedling peonies raised by Mr. John Richardson, more than a hundred years later on these grounds, is named Samuel Henshaw, in honor of the gentleman, the present Curator of the Museum of Comparative Zoölogy in Cambridge, who is the great-grandson of Samuel Henshaw mentioned in the preceding paragraph. The garden which is said to have been laid out by Thomas Oliver, was famous when in Mr. Richardson's possession for the many rare and choice flowers produced in it especially peonies. Richardson's seedling peonies ranking with the very best productions of their kind in the world. These are described in my paper in the Transactions of the Massachusetts Horticultural Society.

"Rev. Oliver Everett died on November 19th, 1802. The following spring his widow with her family removed to Boston. From this time, until it was sold by Edward Everett, no members of the family resided there, it being leased to various persons." (Stark.)

George Richardson leased the house of Mrs. Everett first in the spring of 1819. "Edward Everett sold it to George Richardson November 10, 1833." (Stark). Mr. George Richardson's account book says 1 October, 1833, but Stark's date refers to the date when papers were officially recorded. John Richardson inherited the estate from his brother George in 1861, and on the death of John Richardson his executors sold the house and part of the estate to William Stanford Stevens "October 19, 1838" (Stark). The "triangle," a piece of land lying between Pond and Cottage Streets, which was originally part of the Oliver estate, was not purchased from the Everetts, but was purchased at auction by George Richardson in 1841. John Richardson bequeathed "the triangle" to the city of Boston "to be used as a park or any other purpose except being sold for house lots." (John Richardson's will). On this



land now stands the historic Blake House, moved there for preservation by the Dorchester Historical Society.

"Thomas Oliver remained for several years in Dorchester after his father's death" (Stark), "until 1766, when he purchased an estate on Elmwood Avenue, near Mount Auburn [Cambridge], and erected the mansion afterwards the residence of Gov. Gerry, and . . . James Russell Lowell." (Paige, p. 619). Pl. 2.

Drake (p. 318) questions whether Oliver built the Lowell house, as he says: "It has often been stated that this house was built by Colonel Thomas Oliver . . . about 1760; but as the estate was only leased by him until the year 1770, when he acquired the title by purchase of the heirs of John Stratton, of Watertown, we do not give full credence to the assertion . . . Moreover, in the conveyance to Oliver the messuage itself is named." Oliver purchased a number of parcels of real estate in Cambridge, part of which are considered in the following. He purchased, 8 October 1766 (Middlesex Deeds, Book 66, p. 375), of Christopher Grant thirty-eight acres in this vicinity, among which was a parcel of land with a dwelling house and barn, consisting of six acres, bounding easterly and southerly on the Great Road leading to Watertown [*i. e.* the corner of Elmwood Avenue and Mt. Auburn Street], westerly on land of Seth Hastings, and northerly on land of Joseph Palmer. [This parcel of six acres purchased of Grant, from its location and size, necessarily included the site of the Lowell house]. Oliver purchased, 31 March 1767 (Middlesex Deeds, Book 66 p. 624), of Joseph Palmer fifteen acres bounding easterly on the Great Road leading to Watertown [now Elmwood Avenue], southerly on land Thomas Oliver bought of Christopher Grant, westerly on land of Seth Hastings, and northerly on land of Samuel Thacher and George Ruggles. In 1770 (Middlesex Deeds, Book 70, p. 134) Oliver leased of the widow, and in the same year purchased (Book 71, p. 9, 11, 12) of the heirs of John Stratton<sup>1</sup> a certain messuage and parcel of land containing about seventeen acres, lying on the northerly side of the present Mt. Auburn Street, and extending to

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<sup>1</sup> John Stratton "married Mercy Norcross 3 May 1750." (Paige.) His widow later married Christopher Grant, from whom Oliver bought land in 1766. Grant's name appears in both the deed of 1766, and the lease of 1770, in the deed in his own right, and in the lease as the husband of his wife, widow of Stratton, to whom the land had been assigned as dower.





THOMAS OLIVER'S HOUSE IN CAMBRIDGE. LATER THE RESIDENCE OF ELBRIDGE GERRY, AND JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

Fresh Pond. This is evidently the *messuage* and land referred to by Drake, but could not include the present Lowell house, which must stand on the land purchased of Grant in 1766. John Stratton's land was farther to the westward on Mt. Auburn Street; Seth Hastings's land of forty acres extending from Mt. Auburn Street to Fresh Pond, and immediately adjoining Oliver's land on the west, as recited in Grant's deed to Oliver. I find no evidence that Christopher Grant was a man of wealth, so that there is no great probability of his having owned or built such a house. The Lowell house, while not resembling the Everett house closely, has a roof balustrade with flames, and in the interior finish has dadoes, wainscoting and carved banisters which are very similar to those of the Everett house. If not a direct imitation, these similarities at least indicate a near period of construction to that of the Everett house, which Thomas's father built in 1745. It seems therefore that all the evidence favors the view that Thomas Oliver tore down the house standing on land purchased of Grant in 1766 and built the mansion now known as the Lowell house. In the deed from Grant, Thomas Oliver is described as of Dorchester, whereas in all subsequent deeds as of Cambridge. The details of Oliver's purchases gathered from the Registry of Deeds are facts kindly furnished me by Henry M. Spelman, Esq., of Cambridge.

Continuing with the account of Thomas Oliver: "Being a man of fortune, he was not actively engaged in business; nor did he mingle in the stormy political contests of that eventful period, until, in a day fatal to his peace and quiet, he accepted the office of Lieutenant-governor of the Province [of Massachusetts], and President of a Council appointed by the King in a manner particularly obnoxious to popular resentment. On the morning of 2 Sept. 1774, a large number of Middlesex free-holders (Gov. Oliver says about four thousand), assembled at Cambridge, and induced the recently appointed Mandamus Councillors to renounce their offices. The President of the Council was not spared; but, though he urgently requested delay, inasmuch as he could not with propriety renounce that office, while he held that of Lieut.-gov., yet he finally yielded, and signed a solemn engagement 'as a man of honor and a Christian,' that he would 'never hereafter, upon any terms whatsoever, accept a seat at said Board, on the present novel and oppressive plan of government.' He left Cambridge



immediately, and never returned. At the evacuation of Boston he accompanied the British forces, soon went to England, and d. at Bristol [England] 20 Nov. 1815, a. 82." (Paige, p. 619-620.) "Though he forfeited a large estate here, he was wealthy from his possessions in the West Indies; still owned by his descendants." (Stark.) "Lieutenant Governor Oliver was a quiet, reserved man, but little known in public life, though ever distinguished by his amiable and gentlemanly grace." (Harris, *Vassalls of N. E.*, p. 124.)

Continuing the consideration of Thomas Oliver's house in Cambridge (Pl. 2). "The house was one of a succession of spacious dwellings set in broad fields, bordering the Charles River, built in the eighteenth century, and occupied for the most part, before the War of Independence, by loyal merchants and officers of the Crown . . . the owners of these estates left them, one by one, as they were forced out by the revolt of the province: but the name of Tory Row lingered about the group . . . [Oliver's house in Cambridge after his leaving] with others in the neighborhood, was seized for public use. When the American army was posted in Cambridge it was used as a hospital for soldiers . . . ["It being represented that the present hospital is not large enough to contain the sick, Lieut.-gov. Oliver's house is to be cleared for that purpose, and care to be taken that no injury is done to it." (Paige, p. 418). To this "care" we doubtless owe much for its good preservation]. Subsequently the estate was confiscated and sold by the Commonwealth . . . The purchaser was Arthur Cabot, of Salem,<sup>1</sup> who later sold it to Elbridge Gerry, Governor of Massachusetts from 1810-1812, and Vice-President of the United States under Madison, from 4 March, 1813, until his sudden death, 23 November, 1814 . . . In 1818 . . . the homestead and some ten acres of land, was sold by Gerry's heirs to the Rev. Charles Lowell." (Scudder, p. 1, 2, 5, 6.) His eminent and youngest son, James Russell Lowell was born there in 1819. Elmwood, as Lowell called it, was his life long, cherished home, and was immortalized by his pen. Capen recently published, in *Country Life*, some excellent photographic illustrations of Elmwood, both the house and surrounding grounds.

Thomas and Elizabeth Oliver as stated married respectively a

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Scudder says Arthur Cabot of Salem, but official records (Middlesex Deeds, Book 95, p. 338) say Andrew Cabot of Beverly.

daughter and a son of Colonel John Vassall, and this association is of great interest. Colonel John Vassall, Senior, son of Major Leonard Vassall, was born in the West Indies 7 September 1713, and graduated from Harvard College 1732 [taking the degrees of A. B. and A. M.]. He married Elizabeth, daughter of Lieutenant Governor Spencer Phips, 10 October 1734; she died 22 September 1739, and he married Lucy, only daughter of Jonathan Barron, of Chelmsford. His children were Ruth, born 14 July 1737, who married Edward Davis of Boston; John, born 12 June 1738, who married Elizabeth Oliver of Dorchester; Elizabeth born 12 September 1739, who married Thomas Oliver of Dorchester, 11 June 1760; Lucy born 15 November 1747, who married John Lavicourt of Antigua. Colonel John Vassall the father bought, 26 July 1736, a house and seven acres of land at the westerly corner of Brattle and Ash Streets, Cambridge, which estate he sold 30 December 1741 to his brother Henry, having probably, in the mean time, either erected or much enlarged the house. This house, which is still standing, is one of the fine old mansions of Cambridge, and is known as the Henry Vassall house, or the Governor Belcher house. Colonel John Vassall later, 17 January 1746, bought six and a half acres on the opposite side of Brattle Street on which the Longfellow house was later built by his son. He died 27 November 1747 [and his tomb is a prominent feature in the old burying ground in Cambridge<sup>1</sup>]. (Paige, p. 674-675).

Henry Vassall, the brother of John, as noted above, "was born in the West Indies 25 December 1721, and married Penelope, the daughter of Isaac Royall, of Medford, 28 January 1742. (Paige, p. 675). As Mrs. Royall was the grandmother of Thomas Oliver her daughter who married Henry Vassall was consequently the aunt of Thomas Oliver and also half-sister to Thomas's mother Mrs. Robert Oliver of Dorchester.

John Vassall, Second, the son of John Vassall, Senior, born in 1738, graduated from Harvard College, 1757, ten years after his father's death and married Elizabeth the daughter of Robert Oliver and sister of Thomas Oliver, the 12 June 1761, and had John, born 7 May 1762; Spencer Thomas, born 7 April 1764; Thomas Oliver, born 12 April 1766; Elizabeth baptized 5 July 1767; Robert Oliver, born 28 May 1769; Elizabeth, born 5 May

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<sup>1</sup> This tomb is figured by Freese (p. 9).

1771; Leonard, born 1773; and Mary, born in London 26 March 1777. (Paige, p. 675.)

John Vassall, Second, about the time he married Elizabeth Oliver (Drake says about 1759): On the estate originally inherited from his father and by subsequent purchases greatly enlarged erected the splendid mansion<sup>1</sup> (Harris<sup>2</sup>), which was known later as the Washington Headquarters and for many years the homestead of Longfellow. Vassall abandoned it at the commencement of the Revolution and fled with his family to England where he died suddenly 2 October 1797. (Paige, p. 675.)

After Mt. Vernon this house (Pl. 3) is perhaps the best known house in America. A number of good exterior and interior views of the house and grounds have been recently published by Capen, and Holtzoper gives a fine plate of the main doorway. A most interesting account of the various occupants of the house is given by Drake, from which the following facts are taken. Colonel John Vassall, in 1775 became a refugee and retired to England. During the Revolution Colonel John Glover of Marblehead with his famous Marblehead regiment occupied the house as headquarters for a period, it then for eight months became the residence and headquarters of Washington until April 1776. After the war it was occupied by Nathaniel Tracy of Newburyport, who was a brother of my great-grandmother. Then by Thomas Russell; Dr. Andrew Craigie; Jared Sparks, the historian; Edward Everett, while a professor in Harvard College; Willard; Phillips; and Worcester, the lexicographer. In 1837 the poet Longfellow became an inmate, with Mrs. Craigie for landlady, and it was thereafter his beloved home. Washington and Longfellow both occupied as their bed-chamber the southeast room, the right hand of the figure. From this room emanated thoughts of war and thoughts of peace that stirred a nation to its depths.

Still another famous house is closely associated with the Olivers and therefore with the Everett house in Dorchester, namely the Isaac Royall house in Medford, Pl. 3. Freese gives a delightful view of the house, taken in summer, and Holtzoper figures in detail

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<sup>1</sup> Drake says, p. 292, that the house was erected by John Vassall, whose tomb is in the Cambridge Cemetery, but this is an error as he died in 1747.

<sup>2</sup> Harris, in his *Vassalls of New England* gives very full accounts of land purchases of the family.







JOHN VASSALL, SECOND'S, HOUSE IN CAMBRIDGE; LATER OCCUPIED BY WASHINGTON,  
AND THE HOME OF THE POET LONGFELLOW.



ISAAC ROYALL HOUSE IN MEDFORD.

the doorways on the front and rear of the house. Mrs. Robert Oliver was a daughter of James Brown, of Antigua, her mother, Mrs. James Brown, after her husband's death married in 1707 Isaac Royall,<sup>1</sup> a wealthy merchant of Antigua. According to Harris, Isaac Royall in 1732 purchased of the heirs of Lieutenant Governor Usher an estate in Charlestown (Medford) containing about five hundred acres; the house still standing, and widely known as the Royall Mansion was built by Usher. Although the conveyance was dated 1732, Harris says there is evidence that Royall did not occupy his Medford property until some years later. The interior of this house is perhaps the most beautifully ornamented of any old house of its period in this vicinity. Slave quarters were built near the house and the grounds laid out in elegant taste with fruit trees, shrubbery, garden, etc. Isaac Royall died 7 June 1739, and his widow in 1747. According to Drake, she was interred from Colonel Oliver's house in Dorchester [Mrs. Oliver being her daughter], and is buried in the tomb with her husband in the old burying ground in that town. In the tomb are interred William Royall, of Maine, his son Isaac, Senior, the latter's wife, and other members of the family.

Colonel Robert Oliver and his wife are also undoubtedly buried in the Royall tomb. It is definitely stated that he was buried in the "Family Tomb at Dorchester" and there is no Oliver tomb in this cemetery.

The monument at the Royall tomb, in the old cemetery at Upham's Corner, Dorchester, consists of a horizontal slab of marble supported by five sandstone columns. The slab bears a coat of arms consisting of three sheaves of wheat enclosed in a scroll and the following inscriptions; parts of which are nearly effaced by weathering.

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<sup>1</sup> Isaac Royall, son of William, of North Yarmouth, Maine, and later Dorchester, Mass., married 1 July 1697 in Boston, Elizabeth, widow of one Oliver, and daughter of Asaph Eliot. They had one child, Asaph that died in infancy. Harris in his account of the family cites this marriage and birth, but overlooked a second marriage. Oliver shows (vol. 1, p. 77; vol. 3, p. 56.) that Isaac Royall married secondly, Elizabeth, widow of James Brown, at Antigua, 3 (? June) 1707, and quotes the Parish Register at St. Johns in proof. The fact that Isaac's second wife had the same given name as the first fostered the oversight. Isaac's second wife therefore was the mother of Isaac, Second; and Penelope, who married Henry Vassall; not his first wife, as stated by Harris.

"Here lyeth  $\frac{e}{y}$  Body of WILL<sup>m</sup> ROYALL | of *North Yarmouth*, in the PROVINCE | of MAIN. who departed this Life, | Nov<sup>br</sup>  $\frac{e}{y}$  7th 1724 in  $\frac{e}{y}$  85th Year of his Age | this Stone is Erected, to  $\frac{e}{y}$  Pious Memory | of his Father, by his Eldest Son ISAAC. | as the last Act of a dutifull remembrance" |

"Here lyes the Body | of the Hon<sup>ble</sup> ISAAC ROYALL Esq<sup>r</sup> | Who departed this Life at his Seat in **Charlestown** | June  $\frac{e}{y}$  <sup>th</sup> Anno Dom<sup>ni</sup> 1739 *Ætatis* 67. | He was a Gent<sup>n</sup> of Superior natural powers & great acquired knowledge | Civil affable courteous & Just to all Men | Remarkably Dutifull to his Parents, Kind to his Relations & Charitable to  $\frac{e}{y}$  Poor. | He was a faithful Hufband a tender Father a Kind Master & a True Friend | Delighted in doing good. | He was a highly esteemed & respected during his residence at *Antigua* which was near 40 Years | and advanced to  $\frac{e}{y}$  moft Honourable & important Publick employments Civil & Military | Which He difcharged with  $\frac{e}{y}$  higheft reputation & fidelity | He Returned with His Family to *New England* His Native Country | July 27 1737 | Where His death which Soonfollowed was greatly Lamented by all who Knew Him | He Lived a Virtuous Life So He was removed by a peacefull Death | Leaving a SON & DAUGHTER | To inherit a plentiful Fortune which He was Blefd with | And an exemplary Pattern for Their imitation | at His defire His Remains were here | Interred with His Parents | For whom He Erected this | MONUMENT." | <sup>1</sup>

Isaac Royall the Second kept up his father's place in Medford and his daughters married respectively George Erving and Sir William Pepperell of Portsmouth. (Oliver.) He died in London, October 1781. His will was dated 26 May 1778. (Oliver, vol. 3, p. 56-57). Besides numerous bequests to relatives and friends, and public bequests for hospitals and schools, he left some eight hundred or nine hundred acres of land in the township of Grandby, formerly known as South Hadley, and nine hundred and seventy-eight acres in Worcester County, which he bought, in company with others, of the Massachusetts Bay Colony on 28 Dec. 1752, to Harvard College, for the endowment of a professorship of laws. This professorship, known as the Royall Professorship, was the first law

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<sup>1</sup> Oliver in publishing this epitaph makes several errors in the transcription and says that the second portion, or epitaph to Isaac, is on a separate tomb, but this is a mistake, the whole, as quoted, being on a single slab.

professorship of that University. He also left to Harvard College a contingent interest in his estate at Medford and other towns. In a codicil dated 31 Dec. 1779, he made a bequest of two hundred acres in Royallston to Medford, for a free school, and a further bequest of two hundred acres to Harvard College.

In the library of the Harvard Law School is a portrait of Isaac Royall, Second—his wife, sister Penelope (who married Henry Vassall), wife's sister and child, painted in 1740, by Robert Feke, a Quaker of Newport. (Brown.) Isaac Royall being driven out by the Revolution, his house became headquarters for Generals Stark and Lee, and in 1810 passed into the possession of Jacob Tidd. (Drake.)

Such an intimate association of old houses is remarkable, all interesting as choice examples of colonial architecture, the homes of prominent families in colonial times, and later full of historic interest as homes for longer or shorter periods of many of America's most illustrious men.

To state the relation of families and houses in brief: Thomas Oliver's father built the Everett house; his grandmother Royall and her husband lived in the Royall house in Medford, Thomas Oliver doubtless built the Lowell house, and his brother-in-law, John Vassall, built the Longfellow house. In addition Thomas Oliver's near of kin occupied most of the famous old houses in Cambridge known as "Tory Row." His aunt Penelope,<sup>1</sup> wife of Henry Vassall, lived in the Governor Belcher house; his wife's aunt Mary,<sup>2</sup> wife of Richard Leehmere, lived in the Riedesel house;<sup>3</sup> his wife's aunt Rebecca,<sup>2</sup> wife of Judge Joseph Lee, lived in the house which bears his name; his wife's aunt Susanna,<sup>4</sup> wife of Captain George Ruggles, lived in the house now known as the Fayerweather house; and his wife's aunt Anna,<sup>4</sup> wife of John Borland, lived in the Plympton house.

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<sup>1</sup> Penelope, daughter of Isaac Royall, Senior, of Medford, and half sister of Mrs. Robert Oliver of Dorchester. (Paige, p. 675.)

<sup>2</sup> Mary and Rebecca, daughters of Lieut.-Gov. Spencer Phips, therefore sisters of Mrs. John Vassall, Senior. (Paige, p. 627.)

<sup>3</sup> In front of the original site of this house stand some superb European lindens, perhaps the oldest and finest specimens of their species in the country.

<sup>4</sup> Susanna and Anna, daughters of Major Leonard Vassall and therefore sisters of Colonel John Vassall, Senior. (Harris, p. 119.)



This delightful association of old time Tory aristocrats is thus described by Baroness Riedesel in her letters. "Never had I chanced upon such an agreeable situation. Seven families, who were connected with each other, partly by the ties of relationship and partly by affection, had here farms, gardens, and magnificent houses, and not far off plantations of fruit. The owners of these were in the habit of daily meeting each other in the afternoons, now at the house of one, and now another, and making themselves merry with music and the dance—living in prosperity, united and happy, until, alas! this ruinous war severed them, and left all their houses desolate, except two, the proprietors of which were also soon obliged to flee." (Paige, p. 168-9.)

Fuller details in regard to these old houses and their interesting occupants are given in the authorities quoted and other local histories. Especially interesting and complete are the splendid three volume work on the history of Antigua by Oliver, the papers by Harris and Stark, and the very careful, painstaking History of Cambridge by Paige. Mr. J. W. Freese gives a brief account of these and other historic houses in near by towns, fully illustrated by excellent photographic reproductions.

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#### DESCRIPTION OF PLATES.

- PLATE 1. The Robert Oliver (Everett) house, barn and fruit-house, in Dorchester, southwest view, including the corner of Pond and Boston Streets. Taken in the autumn of 1887. Page 3.
- PLATE 2. Thomas Oliver's house in Cambridge, later the residence of Elbridge Gerry and James Russell Lowell. Taken about 1890. Page 9.
- PLATE 3. John Vassall the Second's house in Cambridge, later occupied by Washington, and the long time residence of the poet Longfellow. Taken in recent years. Page 12.
- The lower figure on same plate, is the house of Isaac Royall, Senior, in Medford. Taken in recent years. Page 13.





HISTORY  
OF THE  
OLIVER, VASSALL AND ROYALL  
HOUSES IN DORCHESTER  
CAMBRIDGE AND  
MEDFORD

BY  
ROBERT TRACY JACKSON, S. D.

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BOSTON, 1907











































































































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